

ISHWAR CHANDER AGAR.

A SKETCH OF
His Life and Ca



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ISHWAR CHANDER VIDYASAGAR.

THREE names will stand out conspicuously among the greatest reformers of the nineteenth century, those of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Keshab Chander Sen and Ishwar Chander Vidyasagar. All of them come from Bengal, but their names are household words throughout India. Of these Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chander Sen were the inspirers and founders of a separatist movement, but Vidyasagar wrought from within the Hindu Society. He was the earliest reformer who tried to effect reforms on shastraic lines. But Ishwar Chander was not a mere reformer; he was a great scholar, author, educationist and Sanskritist. As Paul Reinsch says in his *Intellectual and Political Currents in the Far East*, "the name Vidyasagar—Ocean of learning, a *nom de guerre* or might we say, *nom de savoir*, like the titles bestowed on great mediæval teachers was conferred on its holder by his *alma mater*. With a head resembling that of Esopus

as pictured by the Greek sculptor, this Indian scholar, versed in all the classic lore of his country, was no less deeply interested in the broad currents of humanity than was the Greek fabulist, nor was he entirely without the other's sense of humour. He found time to become a leader in social reform movements and to do for the Bengali dialect what Luther had done for his Saxon tongue."

At the beginning of the last century a branch of Bandyopadhyaya or Banerjee (Brahmin) family, poor but respectable, removed from the village of Banamalipur to Birisingha, 52 miles to the west of Calcutta. Ramjay Tarkabushan, the head of the family, who married Durga Devi, the daughter of a profound scholar, had two sons, Thakurdas and Kalidas. As a knowledge of English easily procured berths in European mercantile firms, Thakurdas wanted to acquire English rather than Sanskrit education. He struggled hard to get it as the family was too poor to afford it to him. After severe tribulations, often starvations, he managed to get a situation on Rs. 8 a month. He was then 23 years old and his father married him to Bhagavathi Devi. The first son of the union was the subject of this sketch.

It is said that while Vidyasagar was in his mother's womb, his grandfather, Ramjay, had a dream that a male child who was to obtain world-wide renown was to be born into his family. Ramjay forsook the ascetic life to which he had betaken himself, and returned to his family. Bhavananda Bhattacharya, a profound astrologer of the time, predicted that Bhagavathi Devi would bring forth a remarkable child.

Ishwar Chander Vidyasagar was born on the 26th September 1820 at Birsingha. When he was five years old, he was sent to a primary *putsala* at Birsingha where he got the rudiments of Bengali language from a Kulin Brahmin, Kalikanta Chattopadhyaya. Even then he gave promise of his future powers. He finished his course in the school in three years. Like most great men he was apparently naughty and many anecdotes are told of his childish waywardness and mischievous freaks. Yet the boy was intelligent and the teacher was able to report to his father: "He had finished his curriculum here. You should take him to Calcutta, and place him in a good English school there so that he might receive proper English education."

When Ishwar Chander was nine years old he

was taken by his father Thakurdas to Calcutta for further education. Thakurdas wanted to send him to the Hindu College, but he could not do so for three months. This time the boy spent in a neighbouring vernacular *patsala* under the tuition of a veteran teacher. He was then sent to the Sanskrit College where education was given by Pandits in the old-fashioned style. There Sanskrit education was given to the total exclusion of English. The curricula included Grammar, rhetoric, Smrithi, philosophy, Vedanta, *belles lettres*, astronomy and Ayurveda. The teachers were exceedingly pleased at the uncommon ability displayed by Ishwar Chander. The first three years after joining the College he studied Grammar, standing first in the examinations and carrying away the prizes. Then six months he devoted to the study of Amarakosha and then he took to *belles lettres*. He was then only eleven years old, and the teacher objected to give him admission to the *belles lettres* class on account of his age. He requested the teacher to examine, and having stood the teacher's scrutiny successfully he joined the class.

The first year he studied Raghuvamsa, Kumarasambhava, and Raghava Pandiniya. At

the annual examination he headed the list of successful students and won the first prize. In the second year he read *Magha Bharani*, *Sakuntala*, *Meghaduta*, *Uttaracharita*, *Vikramorvasi*, *Kadambari*, *Dasa Kumaracharita*, *Mudrarakshasa* and other poetical and dramatic works. Most of these he had learnt by heart and could repeat with wonderful accuracy. He was best at translation. Even at the early age of twelve he could speak Sanskrit and Prakrit correctly. Not only his teachers and school-fellows, but the pandits of the day were amazed at the wonderful powers of the boy. He was indeed a prodigy. Here is what his biographer says of him :—

✓ While still in the *Belles-lettres* class, little Isvar Chandra had acquired a great proficiency in grammar and language. He could at this early age, for he was then only thirteen years old, compose beautiful verses, elegant both in style and rhetoric. His *slokas* drew admiration from all classes. On occasion of his visits to his native village, Birsingha, during College-vacations, he used to compose *Sraddha slokas* (invitation letters in Sanskrit verse). On one of these occasions, at the *Sraddha* (last rites in memory of the deceased) of a rich man, Isvar Chandra was asked to compose an invitation *sloka* for the host. He complied with the request and the *sloka*, he composed, was so beautiful that the pundits from different parts of the country, assembled on invitation admired the *sloka*, and wondered who the writer of it was. And when little Isvar Chandra, who was also present in the assembly, was pointed out as the author of the *sloka*, their wonder waxed hundred-fold. They blessed the lad with all their heart, and

remarked, that the boy, in time, would be the best pundit, surpassed, nay equalled, by none.

The hardships and privations Ishwar Chander underwent were really too great and the following gives an account of how he spent his days in those early years :—

✓ Poor Isvar Chandra had to do everything. He did all the marketing and cooking. Coal had not then come into use in Calcutta for purposes of cooking, which was done by fire-wood. Little Isvar Chandra chopped the fuel with his own hands. He cooked food, and distributed it to his father and brother. He did all the cleaning. In short, Isvar Chandra was both a domestic and a cook. He did not feel tired with all these daily house-hold works, but rather performed them with his usual cheerfulness. He felt a sort of inward pride and exultation at being able to show to the world that he was above the ordinary rank and could beat down his compeers in every respect, even under such discouraging circumstances. But the question arises, how could he make time for his studies? After all, Isvar Chandra was a man, and to learn he must read. Mere talents would not do. The answer to the question is that Isvar Chandra was not only talented, but also industrious to the extreme. He was very assiduous, and worked hard at his lessons, and being gifted with a retentive memory, could easily make up for lost time. He never wasted a minute. He read his books even while he was engaged in cooking. In the night, he slept only two hours. After performing the usual house-hold duties and feeding his father and brother, he used to go to bed at 10 P. M., requesting his father, who sat up every night on business till 12 P M., to awaken him (Isvar Chandra) at that hour. He read from mid-night to day-break, when he had to put aside his books, in order to apply himself again to his domestic duties. It is also said, that on his way to and from college, he used to read his books and ponder over his lessons.

While yet thirteen, Ishwar Chander's fame

spread far and wide and naturally there came many offers for marriage. He was married to Dinamayi Devi the next year. While fifteen he joined the rhetoric class. Premchand Tarkavagis, the teacher, was an erudite pandit, well versed in grammar, language and rhetoric. Of his many pupils Ishwar Chander was the youngest and the brightest. In one year Ishwar finished Sahitya-darpana, Rasagangadhar and other works on rhetoric. He won a monthly scholarship of Rs. 8. In 1837 he joined the Smriti class. (The general practice at that time was that students should pass through the philosophy and Vedanta classes before they could be admitted into the Smrithi class.) But Ishwar resolved to study Smrithi first, as he had a great desire to pass the Law Committee Examination and become a Judge-Pandit, (for unless one passed that examination, one could not aspire to that post.) He therefore applied to the authorities and obtained permission to study Smrithi before philosophy and Vedanta. (The subject was so very difficult that even those who had gone through these courses took two to three years to study the Mithakshara, Dayabhaga and Manusanghita and then to obtain a tolerable knowledge of Smrithi.

Soon after passing the examination Ishwar Chander applied for a Judge-Pandit's post that fell vacant in Tippera; he obtained the situation, but his father would not permit him to go so long a distance. He had to decline it. He continued his lessons in Vedanta and while he was studying the philosophy, he was appointed for two months to officiate as second teacher of Grammar on a salary of Rs. 40.

As soon as he passed the final examination of the Sanskrit College, he won the title of Vidya-sagar from the College. It was indeed a unique honor and it was at the early age of twenty. Even while reading in the College in 1838, Mr. John Mayor, a Civilian offered a prize of Rs. 100 for the best essay in 100 slokas of a description of the earth and the celestial globe according to the ancient Hindu puranas, Surya Siddhantha and the modern European nations. Ishwar Chander's poem was considered the best and he won the prize.

After leaving the Sanskrit College Ishwar Chander took up a post under Mr. Marshall in the Fort William College which had been established for the education of English Civilians in the vernaculars of the country. The head

Pandit had frequently to come into contact with Englishmen and Ishwar therefore desired to study English. He began to study the English language under Dr. Durgacharan Banerjee, the father of Babu Surendranath Banerjee. He studied Mathematics and Shakespeare critically. He displayed equal ardour in studying as in teaching. He undertook to give lessons in Sanskrit to a number of students and his method was so novel that students were able to learn in a much shorter time what they were to study in long years elsewhere. It is said that a friend of Vidyasagar desired to study the ancient language under him. Vidyasagar was afraid that his pupil was too old to begin with Mugdhabodha or any other Sanskrit Grammar, and that he might lose his patience and give it up as a waste of time. He therefore thought of devising some method by which he could make the learning of Sanskrit attractive as well as easy to his pupil. He dismissed the pupil on that day and set about thinking of an easy mode of teaching Grammar. (When the pupil came the next morning he found to his utter astonishment that a short abridgment of the Sanskrit Grammar, Mugdhabodha, in Bengali characters, composed by Vidyasagar ready for

his use. Later on, with this as the basis, he published a short Sanskrit Grammar in Bengali, Upakramanika, which chalked out an easy road to the study of Sanskrit.

With the aid of this manuscript, abridged grammar and an elementary Sanskrit book printed at the Baptist Press, Raj Krishna Babu began to learn Sanskrit. In three months, he acquired a little knowledge of the language, and had some idea of its grammar. He then began to read the *Mugdhabodha*, which he, by dint of his indefatigable zeal and toil, and unremitting perseverance, and through Vidyasagar's ingenious mode of instruction, mastered in six months. He then applied himself to the study of the Sanskrit Literature. Vidyasagar now urged Raj Krishna Babu to prepare himself for the Junior Scholarship examination of the Sanskrit College. The system of Junior and Senior Scholarship examinations had been introduced into Sanskrit College by Mr. Marshall. Raj Krishna Babu applied himself in right earnest, and was fully prepared for the examination, when Vidyasagar was told that a poor Brahman boy was getting the junior Scholarship of eight rupees. It then struck Vidyasagar that if Raj Krishna Babu should appear at the examination and succeed in winning the scholarship, the poor boy would be deprived of his only means. He informed Raj Krishna Babu of everything, and told him to desist, for the present, from his attempts at the Junior Scholarship examination. He then urged his apt pupil to prepare himself for the Senior Scholarship examination; at which Raj Krishna Babu said,—‘Do you think Sir, I shall be able to qualify myself for that?’ ‘Why not?’ replied Vidyasagar, “but, mind, you shall have to take more pains. Only if you accompany me every day to the Fort William College, I believe, I shall be able to make you fit for the examination.” Raj Krishna Babu agreed to this, and accompanied him daily to the Fort William College. Vidyasagar was occupied in teaching the Civilians and in doing other duties up to 3 P.M., after which he devoted himself wholly in giving lessons to Raj

Krishna Babu till sun-set. They then returned to their houses, and after supper, again applied themselves in giving and receiving instruction till a late hour in the night. By such unremitting toil and perseverance, both on the part of the pupil and the teacher, Raj Krishna Babu was fully instructed in Sanskrit Grammar, *Belles-lettres* and Smriti, in two years and a half. He appeared at the Senior Scholarship examination of 1843-44, and passed it creditably with a second grade scholarship of fifteen rupees a month. Two years after this, he won a first grade scholarship of twenty rupees. He had a great mind to appear at the next higher (*i.e.*, final) examination, but, unfortunately, his health having been very much impaired by his excessive toils, he was obliged to forego his design, and remove to a sanitarium to recruit his health.

The news of this unparalleled success soon spread like wild fire, and surprised even the learned professors of the Sanskrit College. People of all classes daily flocked to Vidyasagar's house, with an eager desire to have a sight of the unusually intelligent and hardworking pupil and of his ingenious and clever teacher. In fact, *the mode of instruction adopted by Vidyasagar was quite novel*, and was a conspicuous proof of his inventive genius. Was it very strange then, that the people were so curious about it?

Vidyasagar did much to introduce various reforms in the Fort William College. After he entered the College he witnessed a great change in the educational policy of the country. When he first entered the Sanskrit College as a student in 1829 English education had spread only among some respectable residents of Calcutta and its neighbourhood who appreciated the value of English education and tried to introduce it. One

day Lord Hardinge, the then Governor-General of India paid a visit to the College when he had a long talk with Vidyasagar on various educational topics. As a result of the conversation it was settled that a number of vernacular schools should be established. Between 1844 to 1846 as many as 101 such schools were established in different parts of the country styled "Hardinge Schools" after the name of their founder.

While as Head Pandit in the College he gave himself up to much literary work. He devoted himself to the development of his mother tongue. He also now and then composed Sanskrit verses. He composed 408 *slokas* in Sanskrit on Salmalidvip, Kusadvip, Sakadvip and other names of the countries according to the Puranic geography of the Hindus, and on America, England, France, Africa and Asia,—modern names,—according to the Westerners. He also wrote brief annotations on Uttaracharita, Meghaduta and Sakuntala.

Vidyasagar was asked by the authorities of the institution while in the service of the Fort William College to write good readable books in Bengali prose for the use of the college students. He complied with their request by writing a book Vasudevacharita, compiled from Srimad Bhaga-

vada, a religious book of the Hindus in Sanskrit. "It was not exactly *verbatim* translation throughout. Some portions of the original were omitted here and there, the sense only was taken, and only a portion of the original text was literally translated. Considering the nice style, choice diction, and beautiful, easy, flowing language of 'Vasudeva-Charita' it must be said, that it very nearly approaches an original composition. It may be taken as a good model of Bengali prose. Unfortunately for the Hindu readers of Bengal, 'Vasudeva-Charita' was not approved by the authorities of the Fort William College, and was, therefore, not published. The book treats of *Sri Krishna*, trying to demonstrate himself to be a bodily incarnation of the Supreme Deity. Vasudeva Charita although only a translation, is not wholly wanting in proofs of his creative genius. Vidyasagar was the first to show the way how to compose translations in chaste, plain, easy, graceful language."

While still employed in the Fort William College on a salary of Rs. 50 a month the post of the first teacher of the Grammar class carrying a salary of Rs. 90 a month fell vacant and Vidyasagar was offered the post. But he preferred to forego his

own advantage in favour of the famous Taranath Tarkavachaspati whom he thought a worthier person than himself to fill that chair. On that occasion he had to travel as many as 100 miles in the short space of 45 hours for the purpose of asking his friend to apply for that post. The great professor and his father were surprised at the troublesome journey undertaken by the young man and said: "Glory to you, Vidyasagar! You are not a man, but a God in human form."

In 1846, on the death of Rama Manikya Vidyalankar, the post of the Assistant Secretary of the Sanskrit College fell vacant. The Secretary of the College had known Vidyasagar since he was a student in the Sanskrit College. If he was induced to take up the post, he thought that his services would be of immense use to the College. He therefore made representations to the Director of Public Instruction to request Vidyasagar to join the staff of the college and a letter was sent to him offering him a salary of Rs. 50 a month, the same as that in the Fort William College, which might be subsequently raised on approved service. The Secretary also pressed him to accept the post saying, "If you accept the post, the College is sure to

rise, and when the College rises, your pay must rise too."

He accepted the offer of the Assistant Secretary to the Sanskrit College. Here he had to bring about several changes and improvements in almost all respects. Neither the professors, nor the students, observed any regularity of time in attending and leaving the College. He had first to check this practice. He then expunged all obscene texts from the books prescribed for the students of the College. He introduced also a novel plan of teaching grammar. He devised a new system of conducting examinations and introduced Mathematics into the *Belles Lettres* classes.

Vidyasagar was also a man of strong will and independent judgment. It was against his nature to show undue favour in the discharge of his public duties. His official superior had begun to oppose his measures and policy and he resigned his office.

Vidyasagar then entered on the second term of office in the Fort William College which lasted only for a short time. He rejoined the Sanskrit College on the 9th December 1850 as professor of *Belles lettres* on a salary of Rs. 90 a month. Before rejoining the College he publish-

ed in 1847 *Vetala Panchavingsati*, a translation of the Hindu *Vaisala Parnchisi* which was compiled at the instance of Mr. Marshall for the use of the students of the Fort William College.

Of this book Babu Jagendra Nath Vidyabhusan, M. A., says:—"Into Vidyasagar's *Vitala Panchavingsati*, many new ideas and sweet sentences were introduced by Tarkalankar. It was so far corrected and revised by him that it might be said to be the joint production of the two friends, like the works of Beaumont and Fletcher."

In 1848 appeared Vidyasagar's "History of Bengal" in Bengali and in September 1849 *Jibana Charita*. This was also a piece of translation, compiled from Chamber's Biography. It contained the lives of men like Galileo, Newton, Herschel, Grocius, Leonius, Dewal and Jones. The next year after Vidyasagar's re-appointment in the Sanskrit College the posts of the Secretary and his Assistant were abolished and in their stead the post of Principal was newly created. Vidyasagar was made the first Principal in January 1851. Shortly after his appointment as Professor of *Belles-lettres* Vidyasagar was charged by the Education Coun-

cil to report on the working of the Sanskrit College. He presented a very able and learned report in English which won the admiration of the Education Council.

Vidyasagar's chief aim was to improve the College and he applied himself heart and soul to remodel the school and bring it to proper working order. He first directed his attention to regulate the punctual attendance of the professors who had again fallen into their old habits. He then bestowed his thought on the internal improvement of the College. He abolished inflicting corporal punishment to enforce discipline. There was at that time obtaining an one-sided practice in the College restricting the admission of boys of other castes than the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisya.

He reported to the Education Council against it. He wrote :—

| When the Vaidyas, who are no better than Sudras are allowed to read in the College, I see no reason why the Kayasthas should not. Moreover, when Amrita Lal Mitra, a son-in-law of Raja Radha Kanta Dev Bahadur of Sobhabazar, and lately a student of the Hindu School has been permitted to read in the Sanskrit College, there can be no reason why other Kayasthas should not. That the Kayasthas are Kshatriyas, Raja Raj Narayan of Andul once tried to demonstrate. The Kayasthas belong to one of the respectable castes of Bengal. For the present, they should be permitted to read in the College.

But the innovation was opposed by the other teachers of the College. His biographer says :—

In fact, not only the teachers of the Sanskrit College, but also private professors of Calcutta and its neighbourhood had raised a hue and cry against this just innovation. Their chief contention was, that if the sons of the lower castes were allowed to read Sanskrit, their Hindu religion would be polluted. But Vidyasagar refuted them by reasonable arguments, and by quotations of passages from the very *Shastras*. He asked the professors, that if they believed that the Sudras were not entitled to Sanskrit education, how was it then that Raja Radha Kanta Der, who was as well a Sudra, could obtain instruction in Sanskrit, and the professors did not object to his discussion of the *Sastras*? He also asked them, that when they were disinclined to teach Sanskrit to the Sudras and other low caste boys, how was it that they did not feel compunction in teaching the godly language to Europeans, who were no Hindus, and received, in return, money from them as wages? In fact, he had to toil hard to carry his point by these and other means. He even went so far as to declare to one of his friends, that if he did not succeed in his attempts at this innovation, he would resign his office. But fortunately, he had not to go so far. The authorities approved of his scheme, and they granted permission to take Kayastha boys into the College. It was some time after this, that the other Sudras were also permitted to read, in the Sanskrit College all other branches of the Sanskrit Literature save Theology.

Ishwar Chander did not confine himself to work in his own College. He rendered immense help to Mr. E. J. D. Bethune in establishing a girl school in Calcutta for the propagation of female education in Bengal. Mr. Bethune was convinced that if the people of India were to rise in the

scale of nations, it was necessary that their women should receive education. He was glad to find a co-operator and fellow-worker in Vidyasagar. Through him he secured the assistance and support of his numerous friends. The spread of female education is due to the unremitting exertions of Mr. Bethune ably seconded in his efforts by Vidyasagar's large number of friends.

As Principal of the Sanskrit College Vidyasagar introduced another reform. Hitherto the students of the College were all free scholars and he saw the injustice of it. He wanted only poor boys to be educated free and not the sons of the rich who could afford to pay their tuition fees. The authorities agreed with him and tuition fees began to be collected. Another reform of his was to get the most worm-eaten and time-worn manuscripts on *belles-lettres* in the library of the College printed.

The leisure hours Vidyasagar devoted to literary work. On the 6th April 1851 appeared *Sisuviksha*, a Bengali version of Chambers' "Rudiments of Knowledge." He then devoted his thoughts to the publication of text-books for the Sanskrit College. On the 16th November appeared his *Upakramanika Vyakarana* which was an imitation of Sarkahipatasar Vyakarna. He

then brought out Rajapatha and Kathamala containing many fables narrated in the form of dialogues between lower animals in imitation of Æsop's fables intended to impart moral instruction to young children. On March 1852 appeared parts II and III of Rajapatha and the next year parts I and II of Vyakarana Kaumudi. But he was not content with writing and publishing his own books. He joined some associations engaged in compiling and publishing text-books and encouraged them in various ways.

In 1853, Vidyasagar founded a free school in his native village, Birshinga, and attached to it a night school for the education of the sons of the cultivating class in the night. He purchased a plot of land for the site of the school out of his own funds. He paid the whole cost of the school building. (He himself laid the foundation stone of the building). A girl-school was also started by him about the same time. He defrayed all the expenses for these schools out of his own purse. His free school cost him nearly four hundred rupees every month, 300 rupees as pay of the teachers and 100 rupees on purchase of books and slates for poor boys, and articles of furniture and books of reference for the school library. The

night and the girl-schools cost him between 40 to 45 rupees a month. Besides these schools, he established, about this time, a charitable dispensary, in his native village, for treatment of poor patients, who received free visits, in serious cases from the medical officer in charge, and medicines free of cost from the dispensary. This charitable institution cost him nearly one hundred rupees a month. (All these expenses he met from his own purse.) The new scheme of instruction introduced by him into the College met with the approbation of the Education Council, and was productive of better results. The numerical strength of the College rose considerably. The authorities were satisfied with the working of the scheme, and, in January, 1854, they raised his pay from 150 to 300 rupees a month. His monthly income from the sale of his publications averaged between four to five hundred rupees. So that, it is clearly seen that what he earned he spent on charitable purposes, leaving no margin for times of need.

In 1855 the Government resolved upon starting aided English and Vernacular schools in different parts of the country and Ishwar Chandar was called upon to report on the mode of instruction to

be imparted in those schools and the scheme of their working. The report that he submitted commended approbation. He was appointed a Special Inspector of Schools, on a monthly salary of Rs. 200 in addition to his pay of Rs. 300 for holding the post of the Principal of the Sanskrit College. Vidyasagar soon submitted another report for the opening of a normal school to train teachers for the newly established schools. A normal school was established in the premises of the Sanskrit College under Vidyasagar's management.

Great as was Vidyasagar's work in the cause of education, greater still was his work in social reform. He interested himself in female education and the remarriage of widows and worked for them with an earnestness and assiduity which were the admiration of all. He felt keenly the sad fate of the widowed girls than which nothing more heart-rending exists in our social polity and he resolved upon devoting himself heart and soul for the blotting out of this evil of enforced widowhood from the Hindu Society.

As a Sanskrit scholar he naturally turned his thoughts toward the Shastras to draw inspiration from them and found that there were texts in favour of reform. The result was the publication

of pamphlets in Bengali discussing the question and pointing out that the Shastras allow the re-marriage of widows.

He then got them translated into English. On the 14th October 1855 he got a memorial presented to the Government of India. The memorial said :—

"1. That by long established custom the marriage of widows among Hindoos is prohibited.

"2. That in the opinion and firm belief of your petitioners this custom, cruel and unnatural in itself, is highly prejudicial to the interests of morality, and is otherwise fraught with the most mischievous consequences to society.

"3. That the evil of this custom, is greatly aggravated by the practice among Hindoos of marrying their sons and daughters at an early age, and in many cases in their very infancy, so that female children not unfrequently become widows before they can speak or walk.

"4. That in the opinion and firm belief of your petitioners, this custom is not in accordance with the Shastras, or with a true interpretation of Hindoo Law.

"5. That your petitioners and many other Hindoos, have no objection of conscience to the marriage of widows, and are prepared to disregard all objections to such marriages, founded on social habit or on any scruple resulting from an erroneous interpretation of religion.

"6. That your petitioners are advised that by the Hindoo Law, as at present administered and interpreted in the Courts of Her Majesty and the East India Company, such marriages are illegal, and the issue thereof would be deemed illegitimate.

"7. That Hindoos, who entertain no objections of conscience to such marriages, and who are prepared to contract them notwithstanding social and religious prejudices are by the aforesaid interpretation of Hindoo Law prevented therefrom.

"8. That, in the humble opinion of your petitioners, it is the duty of the Legislature to remove all legal obstacles to the escape from a social evil of such magnitude which, though sanctioned by custom, is felt by many Hindoos to be a most injurious grievance, and to be contrary to a true interpretation of Hindoo Law.

"That the removal of the legal obstacles to the marriage of widows, would be in accordance with the wishes and feelings of a considerable section of pious and orthodox Hindoos, and would in no wise affect the interests, though it might shock the prejudices, of those who conscientiously believe that the prohibition of the marriage of widows is sanctioned by the Shastras, or who uphold it on fancied grounds of social advantage..

"10. That such marriages are neither contrary to nature nor prohibited by law or custom in any other country or by any other people in the world.

"11. That your petitioners, therefore, humbly pray that your Honourable Council will take into early consideration the propriety of passing a law (as annexed) to remove all legal obstacles to the marriage of Hindoo widows, and to declare the issue of all such marriages to be legitimate.

"And your petitioners, as in duty bound, shall ever pray."

To Vidyasagar's indefatigable exertions the country owes the Widow Remarriage Act of 1855. Mr. Buckland in his "Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors" says :—

Vidyasagar was a Hindu of the orthodox type, but he felt the position of inferiority assigned to the women in India, and on their behalf he started the widow marriage movement * * * When the Indian Legislature passed an Act in 1856 legalising the marriage of Hindu widows, the first widow marriage under the Act took place in Calcutta in December 1856. It was followed by others, both in the Presidency town and in the district of Hooghly and Midnapore. * * * The several pamphlets issued in justification of his views show unri-

walled powers of reasoning as well as deep knowledge of the Hindu scriptures and legal books. To help the movement he ran heavily into debt, which he lived long enough to clear.

Side by side with his work for the remarriage of virgin widows, Vidyasagar set on foot an agitation against the practice of polygamy among the Hindus, especially the Kulin Brahmins. A memorial signed by 25,000 persons was sent up to the Government of India praying for legislative interference. The memorial stated :—

"The Koolins marry solely for money and with no intention to fulfil any of the duties which marriage involves. The women who are thus nominally married without the hope of ever enjoying the happiness which marriage is calculated to confer particularly on them, either pine away for want of objects on which to place the affections which spontaneously arise in the heart or are betrayed by the violence of their passions and their defective education into immorality.

"That the remedy, though obvious and perfectly consistent with the Hindu Law, cannot, in the present disorganised state of Hindu Society, be applied by the force of public opinion, or any other power than that derived by Legislature."

Among those who signed the memorial was the Maharaja of Burdwan. But the Government had only a year before passed the Widow Remarriage Act against considerable opposition and they did not care to venture on another piece of social legislation, however necessary. Nine years after, Vidyasagar again sent up another petition

subscribed by 21,000 men, among the signatories being Maharaja Satis Chandra Roy Bahadur of Nuddea, Raja Satya Saran Ghosal of Bhukailas, Raja Pratap Chandra Sinha of Kandi and others. The memorial declared :—

That about nine years ago no less than 32 petitions signed by nearly twenty-five thousand Hindus of Beugal, were presented to the late Legislative Council of India, bringing to the notice of the Council, the grievous and revolting abuse of the practice of polygamy in Bengal and praying for a legislative enactment for the prevention thereof.

"It is superfluous for your petitioners to dilate on the evils which result from the pernicious custom under notice, or to reiterate the reasons and considerations which require the interference of the Legislature in this vitally important subject. They have been described and stated at length in the petitions, referred to above, and your petitioners, many of whom had signed the said petitions, desire to mention that they fully subscribe to the allegations, suggestions, and prayers therein contained.

"Occupying the position which the British Government does in India, it is, your petitioners respectfully submit, its manifest duty to meet the wants and wishes of the people by such legislative and administrative measures as may be deemed necessary for the suppression of any social abuses, which are the remnants of customs neither founded on abstract reason nor on the national religions. And this obligation, it is needless to add, becomes the more imperative when the people, as in the present instance, are themselves the most forward in seeking the aid of the Legislature.

Your petitioners are not aware of the reasons which influenced the late Legislative Council in not responding to such a large, influential and earnest appeal on an admittedly momentous question of social reformation; but they believe that the disastrous events, which shook

the foundation of the Empire in 1857, over-shadowed, for the time being, all considerations of internal progress.

The empire has, however, under the benign dispensation of Providence, entered upon a new era of peace, progress and prosperity, and your Honors' Administration has been distinguished by not a few measures connected with the material and social improvement of the people. It is the fervent hope and prayer of your petitioners that before your Honor lay down the responsibilities of your office, your Honor might signalize the close of your long and successful career by emancipating the females of Bengal from the pains, cruelties and attendant crimes of the debasing custom of polygamy.

In 1871 he published a paper on polygamy and another again the next year. In the preface to the first he wrote :—

The female sex being comparatively weaker, they are dependent on the male sex, the more so on account of the evil customs of Society. Owing to this weakness and dependence, they pass their days in a state of degradation and humiliation. The strong, authoritative male sex commit unlawful acts of violence on the other sex according to their swent will. The females being quite helpless, put up with them patiently, and lead a miserable life. This is almost the case, all over the world. But the sadly deplorable state, under which the females of this unfortunate land pine away on account of the excessive inhumanity, selfishness, and thoughtlessness of our males, is to be found nowhere else. The stronger sex of this country have been cruelly persecuting the weaker one under pretexts of some evil customs and practices, of which polygamy is, at present, the most pernicious of all. This very vile, inhuman practice has caused incalculable sufferings to the woman-kind. The hardships and miseries that females undergo under the prevalence of this custom are really heart-rending. In fact, the violence has run to such excess, that those who have the least conscience and sense of right and wrong, have one and all stood up against this cruel practice.

They heartily wish that it should be abolished this very moment. Under the present state of the country, it is quite impossible to prevent this wide-spread custom without the aid of legislation.

Amidst such toilsome work Vidyasagar never lost sight of writing Bengali books. On the 13th of April 1855 appeared his *Varna-Parichaya* Part I and on the 14th, Part II; both were intended for beginners. In 1856 appeared his *Chitravati*, containing short biographical sketches of such illustrious persons as Daval, Roscoe and others who rose to greatness by dint of perseverance.

The University of Calcutta was established in January 1857 and at a meeting of the University shortly after, a motion was brought forward for the exclusion of Sanskrit from the University and for the abolition of the Sanskrit College. Vidyasagar strongly opposed the motion and it was mainly through his exertions that the motion was negatived and the Sanskrit College was saved from imminent destruction. At a meeting on the 28th November a board of examiners was framed and Vidyasagar was appointed examiner in Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi and Uriya.

Meanwhile, the relation between Vidyasagar and Mr. Young, the Director of Public Instruc-

tion, became strained. The latter did not like the policy of Vidyasagar in starting Vernacular Schools in Bengal. In 1854 the authorities in England sanctioned several lakhs for education and Vidyasagar as Special Inspector began starting schools. Mr. Young was against it and the matter being referred Home was settled in favour of Vidyasagar. Meanwhile the change of Ministry in England brought about a change of educational policy. Mr. Vidyasagar had started a number of schools at the verbal request of Mr. Halliday and bills for them had accumulated for a year. Vidyasagar had to pay the amount from his own pocket, as the schools had been started without authority. Mr. Halliday asked him to sue him in Court but he refused. Another cause for the rupture is thus given :—

There were two spare rooms in the second storey—quite unoccupied, which belonged to the Hindu College. When English was introduced into the Sanskrit College, these two rooms were required by Vidyasagar for English classes. He asked Mr. Young for them, but he was told to see Mr. J. Sutcliffe, the Principal of the Hindu College on the subject. This Vidyasagar declined, as he had already some altercation with Mr. Sutcliffe on the matter. But Mr. Young grew importunate, and, at last, imperative. But Vidyasagar was not the man to yield, and he left the presence of his superior in disgust. Some say, that there arose another serious cause of Vidyasagar's dislike for his superior. As Inspector of

Schools, Vidyasagar had to submit periodical inspection reports of the schools, he visited. In these reports he gave facts and figures as they were actually found by him. On one occasion, Mr. Young asked him to alter his reports in such a way as would show them to advantage. But the honest Vidyasagar flatly denied it, saying that he could not misrepresent facts and that he would rather resign than act in a dishonourable way. This gave umbrage to Mr. Young, who resolved to teach his subordinate a sound lesson.

Vidyasagar tendered his resignation. Mr. Halliday persuaded him not to do so and on his personal request, he continued in the post for a year. But the relation between Vidyasagar and Mr. Young did not improve and he resigned ultimately in 1858. But though he ceased to be an official adviser of Government on educational matters, he was consulted by successive Lieutenant-Governors on all matters pertaining to education.

His retirement from the public service was a source of considerable good to the country. He had already established in Calcutta a printing press, called the Sanskrit Press and started the Sanskrit Press Depository, where he kept for sale all the books printed in his press. By degrees the Depository was converted into a regular bookshop where not only his own books but those of other authors were kept for sale.

Ishwar Chander had great faith not only in English education but also in English institu-

tions. When Babu Hari Chandra Mukerji, the renowned editor and proprietor of the *Hindu Patriot* died in 1861, the paper was purchased by Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha who ran it at a loss for some time. He then made it over to Vidyasagar. Ishwar Chander's choice fell upon Babu Kristo Das Pal to edit the paper and subsequently he was given the proprietorship. No one knew at that time the latent powers of Kristodas but time eloquently vindicated Vidyasagar's choice and under Kristodas Pal, the *Hindu Patriot* became a power in the land. He also started a Bengali weekly, *Soma Prakasa*, and appointed Sarada Prasad Ganguli as its editor. It was a new departure in vernacular journalism and it was not only appreciated for its literary excellence but for the loftiness of its ideal.

In 1860 Vidyasagar republished in pamphlet form those portions of the Bengali version of the Mahabharatha which had already appeared in the *Tathvabodhini Patrika* and in 1861 his *Sita Vanavas*, a Bengali version of Bhavabhuti's *Uttararama Charitha*. In 1862 appeared his *Vyakarana Kaumudi*, part IV, which was his last Sanskrit grammatical work dressed in Bengali.

In 1863 Vidyasagar was nominated by the

Board of Revenue as a visitor of the Ward's Institution established at Calcutta for the training of the minor heirs of the Princes and Zemindars of Bengal. He submitted a memorandum which so interested the Board that they called for a fuller report. He submitted two reports embodying various suggestions. Needless to say most of the reforms suggested by him were adopted.

In 1859 the Metropolitan Institution was founded with a view to imparting English education to the middle-class Hindu youths at a lesser tuition fee than what was charged in the Government schools. The school was at first managed by the founders themselves but after a few months they requested Vidyasagar to assist them in managing the school. He was appointed as a member and Secretary of the Committee of Management. In 1868 the sole responsibility devolved on him and he took the burden cheerfully. In January 1872 he formed a committee for the management of the institution consisting of himself, Dwarkanath Mitter and Kristodas Pal as members. Soon after the formation of the committee an application was made for the affiliation of the institution to the Calcutta University up to the First Examination in Arts. He also

addressed a letter to Mr. F. C. Bayley, soliciting his support to the movement. The affiliation was granted and the institution was made a second grade College. Vidyasagar engaged the most distinguished Indian scholars of the time as professors of the College and the exceptionally brilliant results produced by the institution attracted many students from other colleges. In 1879 it was made a first grade College. The institution also had an attached school of 800 boys and four or five branches in different quarters of the City of Calcutta. At a cost of one and a half lakh of rupees Vidyasagar raised a magnificent building for it.

In 1866 a bill was introduced into the Legislative Council on the alienation of *Devatra* property. The Board of Revenue asked his opinion based on Hindu law. Vidyasagar sent the following reply :—

“With reference to the correspondence forwarded to me under docket No. 656 B, dated 13th ultimo, I beg to state that there do not appear to be any texts in the Books on Hindu Law which either permit or prohibit the alienation of *Devatra* property. But the general practice of the country does not sanction the disposition of such property in any shape. In fact, when Endowments of this description are made by Hindus, they make them with the sole object of securing the property endowed from any sort of alienation, and attach conditions accordingly.

Trustees are consequently prohibited from disposing of the property. Though no distinct ruling on the point is traceable in any of the Text Books, no alienation can be permitted in accordance with the principles of Hindu Law. According to that Law, alienation cannot take place except with the *express consent* of the owner, and as in the case of *Devatra* property the Idol, to which it is consecrated, is the owner, it cannot be disposed of except with its consent, which, as a matter of course, can neither be given nor extorted. Hence, *Devatra* property has become inalienable.

"2 I am fully aware of the difficulties which may occasionally be felt by trustees in the execution of the trusts in connection with Religious Establishments. Circumstances may arise, which may compel them to incur liabilities, which the fixed income of the Trust will never enable them to meet; because, in many cases, the endowers appropriate the income in such a way as to leave little or no margin for any extraordinary or unforeseen expenditure connected with the endowments, such as repairs of temples, payment of Government Revenue in cases when it is not realized from the ryots in consequence of draught, inundation or other causes &c. It cannot be expected that Trustees will meet this expenditure from their own funds or from subscriptions. Some provision must, therefore, be made by Law for the purpose, and on this consideration, I see no objection to section I of the Bill No 8 of 1866, if it be so worded as to express distinctly that the funds raised by the disposition of the property are to be appropriated solely to meet extraordinary or unavoidable expenditure connected with Religious Endowments. Disposal of *Devatra* property for such purposes would not, in my humble opinion, be inconsistent with the principle of Hindu Law. The chief object of all endowments is to guard against misappropriation, and as the extra expenditure referred to is solely and entirely required for *Devatra* purposes, it can on no account, be considered in the light of misappropriation. Nay, if the Idol could be made to speak, it would certainly not only have given its consent, but would have also insisted on the disposition of its property under such contingencies.

7 "3. Alienation being allowable only under the circumstances above set forth, Section 11 of the bill appears to me to be objectionable, as it confers undue powers on Trustees, and prescribes that it is not necessary for purchasers or mortgagees of Devatra property to enquire into the necessity or expediency of the sale or mortgage or to see that no more than is absolutely required is raised. With such unlimited powers on the part of Trustees, and freedom from all responsibility on that of the purchasers or mortgagees, the property may probably be liable to misappropriation against which it is absolutely necessary to guard. I believe that the Law in regard to the disposition of other Trusts enjoins upon purchasers or mortgagees to make reasonable enquiries about the immediate necessity for the alienation. The benefit to be conferred or the danger to be averted by alienating, a portion of the Trust property must be the criterion by which the validity of such alienation is to be judged of. With such provisions in cases of other Trusts, it is not clear why similar conditions should not be attached to transfers of Devatra Trusts. I would therefore take the liberty to suggest that section 11 may be so modified as to guard against any possible chance of misappropriation. With such modifications, the Bill would, I believe, be opposed neither to the spirit of Hindu Law nor to the general feelings of the Hindu community on the subject.

On the new year's day of 1880 Vidynsagar was conferred upon him the distinction of C. I. E. He was by nature averse to such distinctions and he declined the title. (After much persuasion he was induced to accept it.) Three years before a certificate of honor was presented to him "in recognition of his earnestness as leader of the widow remarriage movement and position as

leader of the more advanced portion of the Indian community."

In 1890 the Age of Consent Bill was introduced into the Legislative Council. It was a measure which divided Hindu society as no other measure had done before. Vidyasagar opposed the bill as it was. His opinion was that Garbadiva Samskara was a religious usage in conformity with the Shastras binding upon the Hindus and as there was no certainty at what age a female might have her first menses, the placing of restriction in the age limit for the consent of the female, would be a direct interference with the religious customs of the country. In his note on the subject he wrote:—

"Though on these grounds I cannot support the Bill as it is, I should like the measure to be so framed as to give something like an adequate protection to child-wives, without in any way conflicting with any religious usage. I would propose that it should be an offence for a man to consummate marriage before his wife has had her first menses. As the majority of girls do not exhibit that symptom before they are thirteen, fourteen or fifteen, the measure I suggest would give larger, more real, and more extensive protection than the bill. At the same time, such a measure could not be objected to on the ground of interfering with a religious observance.

"From every point of view, therefore, the most reasonable course appears to me, to make a law declaring it penal for a man to have intercourse with his wife, before she has her first menses.

'Such a law would not only serve the interests of humanity by giving reasonable protection to child-wives, but would, so far from interfering with religious usage, enforce a rule laid down in the Sastras. The punishment, which the Sastras prescribe for violation of the rule, is of a spiritual character and is liable to be disregarded. The religious prohibition would be made more effective, if it was embodied in a penal law. I may be permitted to press this consideration most earnestly on the attention of the Government.

In February 1891 Vidyasagar went to Chander-nagore where he lived a retired life. In June of the same year he had a pain in his side regions and the best medical aid given him was of no use. On the 29th July he passed away, mourned by the whole country. A grateful people have set up a statue in the premises of the Sanskrit College, but he has raised for himself by his patriotic and disinterested labours in a number of directions, a monument in the hearts of his countrymen certainly more enduring than brass or marble.

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